Tom Raymond's civic planning began Newark's 'golden age'

Late Mayor, Class of '95, called Newark's 'most far-sighted public official in century'

By Stanley B. Winters

When Mayor Thomas L. Raymond died unexpectedly on October 7, 1928, the leaders of a grieving city pledged that his name would live forever in the Newark he had served so well. Today, the name Raymond is unknown to most people except when they drive in Newark on Raymond Boulevard or around Penn Station on two short streets named Raymond Plaza. Many other monuments to Raymond's civic vision, however, endure to maintain his reputation as Newark's most farsighted public official in this century. A look at some of his planning achievements may persuade the reader to recognize his claim to this distinction.

Before World War I Newark stood near the forefront of the urban planning movement in the United States. The city's rapid, uncontrolled growth in population, industry, trade, housing, and street layout prompted the Common Council in 1911 to create a City Planning Commission similar to those in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and other major cities. Civil engineer Ernest P. Goodrich and architect George B. Ford were hired to study Newark's physical facilities and submit recommendations for their improvement and future development. Goodrich and Ford engaged a young assistant, Harland Bartholomew, a

A progressive politician, Mayor Raymond blended beauty and practicality in his beloved city

Massachusetts native who began his city planning career in Newark and soon became a distinguished member of the profession. Bartholomew was named secretary to the Planning Commission and in 1915 shepherded into print Newark's first overall plan for its future growth. Lucidly written and emphasizing physical betterment, including housing and public schools, the plan contained more than 80 recommendations designed to be implemented over a 50-year span. Action on the recommendations was postponed because of fiscal prudence by city officials, America's entry into World War I, and a voter-approved change in Newark's form of government. Some were subsequently realized on a piecemeal basis; others were disregarded altogether.

Under Newark's new commission form of government, elected in November 1917, the Planning Commission was abolished along with many other agencies. Nevertheless, the idea of city planning remained alive. In May 1922, City Commissioner Raymond hired two engineers to comprise the Newark Bureau of City Planning so as to handle street alignments and transportation problems. Fortunately for posterity, Raymond's concept of city planning went far beyond such important but mundane matters. It arose from his patrician upbringing, developed aesthetic sense, historical understanding, and varied experience in public life.

Thomas Raymond was born into a comfortable and well-

Mayor Thomas Raymond '95

connected family in East Orange in 1875. He received an excellent education, including study at Newark Academy, training ground for upper-class young men and future leaders of business and government, and at New York University. After practicing law in Newark, he was appointed a district court judge. He resigned to become assistant Essex County prosecutor and thereafter sought the Republican nomination for state senator in 1908, only to lose narrowly. In the Newark municipal election of 1914 he defeated long-time Democratic Mayor Jacob Haussling. He won election to the five-member City Commission in November 1917 and for 11 years was the only Republican on it, serving as commissioner and, from 1925 until his death, as mayor.

Raymond came to prominence at a time when Newark's wealthy industrial and mercantile families were committed to the city and were willing, under his tutelage, to support measures for civic improvement and celebration. A politician of a progressive and independent sort, Raymond was definitely not an ordinary man. He was animated in his goals for Newark's downtown core by classical and Renaissance ideals of space and beauty, which he blended with shrewd, practical, and farsighted elements intended to secure the city's economic well-being into the distant future. Along with his close friend, John Cotton Dana, he ardently supported the Newark Public Library, the Newark Museum, and other cultural institutions.

Raymond apparently felt the "melting pot" had worked sufficiently well among Newark's diverse immigrant groups to enable the city's leaders to enlist many residents in higher pursuits than those of mere daily living. During the commemoration in 1916 of the 250th year of Newark's founding, he suggested that the relentless quest for economic wealth, having been successfully pursued among the city's upper class, might now give way to the cultivation of "old ideals of culture and intellectual intensity." He spoke of a "Master City" that would not only be preeminent in commerce and industry but also would be "dominated by a lofty and aspiring soul which places it by the side of the world's fairest cities." Such phrasemaking, while perhaps unintelligible to many good citizens, flattered the wealthy businessmen and worldly professionals with whom Raymond associated, and it didn't hurt him at the polls.

Raymond's greatest civic achievements were in the form of public works, the department of government he headed while a

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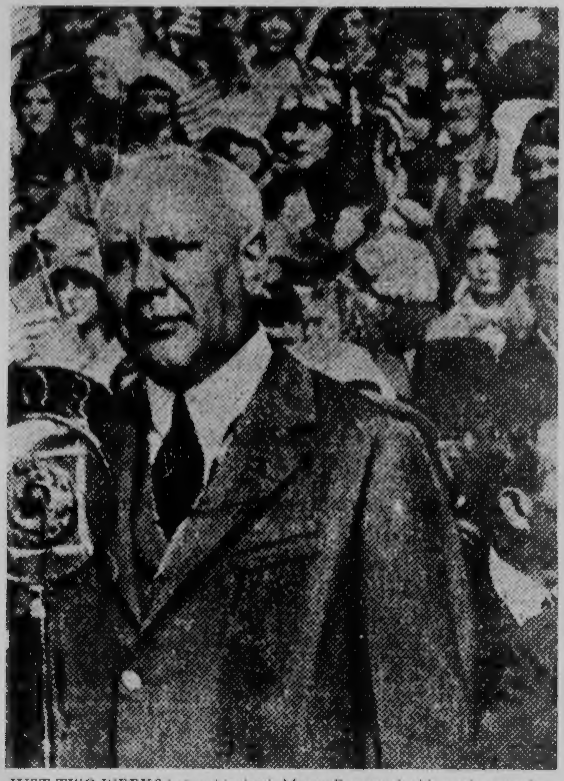
city commissioner. Water supply planning and optimum use of waterfront lands were among his favorite subjects. He did not conceive the idea for Wanaque Reservoir but he pushed for its completion, and especially for the great dam officially dedicated in July 1931 as the Raymond Dam. He dreamed of a Greater Newark that would encompass the Essex County suburbs and a vast cooperative relationship that might enable it to outstrip New York in certain respects. Unfortunately, by the 1920s such city-suburban cooperation was impossible to bring about. He wanted a U.S. Navy yard located at Port Newark to build government aircraft. He pressed for construction of Newark Airport on a scale adequate to serve the whole metropolitan area. He persuaded the Pennsylvania Railroad to build a fitting, monumental passenger terminal in the center of the city. He urged extension of the Hudson Tubes passenger service to South Street to stimulate growth in that part of town, reconstruction of the old Morris Canal bed for transit use, street widenings and realignments downtown to speed traffic, expansion of Port Newark to service ocean-going vessels, and development of the 1800-acre meadowlands to Newark's best advantage. He called the meadows "the most valuable land in the world. . . This generation has spent money for it, but the next will reap the benefits."

Raymond revived citizen participation in city planning in Newark by spurring creation of an Advisory Planning Board. When the *Newark Evening News* called for such a board in January 1925, it adopted Raymond's regional perspective and editorially advocated that nearby suburbs should have representatives on it.



JUST TWO WEEKS before his death Mayor Raymond addressed a crowd in front of Newark's City Hall.

The secret of Raymond's success, according to historian Paul Stellhorn, lay in his combination of business boosterism with efficient local government, thereby gaining support from both sectors. Behind the involvement of business in city affairs was its wish to have local government bear the cost of major capital improvements such as the sea- and airport and a trolley-subway. These projects would strengthen Newark's competitive economic position at minimum expense to private enterprise.

He was the moving force behind Newark Airport, Penn Station, Port Newark

Raymond's "Master City" typified the vision of a city by an urban patrician at its early 20th-century finest. It looked to the downtown core for rationally planned expansion and modernization to meet the business and cultural needs of affluent families who still regarded the downtown as their preserve. It looked also to the east, toward the meadows and the port whose exploitation would enable Newark to compete in the enormous market of which New York was the heart. Referring to the planned opening of Newark Airport in his final New Year's message to the people of Newark, Raymond said: "I feel that 1928 will be a critical year for Newark. . . We will become the most important airport on this continent, bringing us in touch with the rest of the world to an extent we have never been brought before." Indeed, until the opening of LaGuardia Airport in 1939, Raymond's brash self-confidence and global perspective were to be fully justified.

Raymond's preference for the downtown core and the industrial sections reflected and reinforced the attitude held by leaders of commerce and industry toward Newark's growth in the 1920s and even today. Major governmental attention was to focus on those strategic sections while the city's residential neighborhoods, with their teeming tenements and multiple dwellings, would be left to the free play of market forces as had been the custom. For the majority of Newarkers, who were not homeowners, this meant living in cramped quarters, often with poor plumbing and sanitary facilities, insufficient light and air, and limited recreational space. This was a part of the Newark reality to which Raymond's imposing and lofty plans gave inadequate attention.

At the memorial service marking Raymond's death, his fellow city commissioner William Brennan said: "No one is indispensable, but I'd like to know where we can find another Tom Raymond."

Raymond's public career shows that a committed, broadly educated, adept, and incorruptible elected official can make a substantial difference in the life of a great city. More than half a century later, we still benefit from his prescience. ■

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Pictures courtesy Newark Public Library.